

It's Time to Break Free from the Internet's Platform Police

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replying to [James Poulos](#), "[Online Money, Money Online](#)"

Features

04.30.2020

American Mind

Decentralized protocols are the way out.

Unless conservatives attain an unlikely victory in the culture war, success in electoral politics will not easily be translated into cultural respect or recognition. The past two decades of Republican electoral victories and simultaneous progressive cultural drift demonstrate the point. Even Donald Trump has been unable to induce respect for conservative culture, though his denigration of elites may serve as a short-lived cultural equalizer of sorts. So here is another idea: conservatives should look to decentralized speech infrastructure, free of the chokepoints so often captured by progressive activists.

While suggestions that conservatives “build their own networks” are often met with derision, I want to be clear that this is the only way forward. Some recent attempts have fumbled. Gab quickly became a ghetto for conspiracy theorists, and other attempts to circumvent mainstream platforms have merely pushed the suppression of disfavored speech lower in the infrastructural stack. Payment processors and content delivery services such as Cloudflare have been press-ganged by leftists into content moderation work. Hatreon, a crowdsourced funding platform for Patreon exiles, never got off the ground because credit card processors refused to work with it.

However, away from the public eye, something far more substantive and independent has been quietly built. [It's called Urbit](#), and it is both an operating system and peer-to-peer network—a secure personal cloud computer, accessible anywhere.

Urbit ID provides a digital identity independent of any verifying platform. Facebook may take your account away if it disagrees with your use of it, but your Urbit identity, recorded on the Ethereum blockchain, is yours and yours alone. It functions as both a digital passport, wallet, and sort of land-title to your unique Urbit OS.

The Urbit OS is your new computer. Contemporary computing is much like computing a half century ago. Instead of connecting to a distant mainframe, owned by someone else, you use your desktop machine to connect to distant platforms, owned by someone else. Urbit OS will revive the brief era of true personal computing by moving most outsourced functions back onto your personal computer.

However, unlike a physical personal computer, your Urbit OS runs on the Urbit network, so it can be accessed from any physical terminal or device. Crucially, Urbit is a peer-to-peer network, so users can connect to any other Urbit without reliance on intermediaries vulnerable to capture. Urbit users can natively communicate with each other, or

broadcast to a wide audience, without having to get permission from anyone else.

This puts digital communication back in the hands of the primary communicators in two important ways. First, no one can stop you from speaking to willing listeners. Second, you need only receive desired messages from others. While platforms that rely on algorithmic newsfeeds often bombard users with unwanted content, from advertisements to “recommended tweets” from people you don’t know, you have complete control over your Urbit experience.

This paradigm is not without costs: for example, Urbit users must manually opt-in to connections with others rather than being automatically plugged into a universal communications hub. But this is a small price to pay for control of one’s communications. The reimposition of user agency may feel strange after a decade of reliance on third parties. But it’s a more dignified, human-centric style of computing. It mirrors the control and decision-making capacity we hold over our own bodies and minds, rendering the computer more of an extension of ourselves than a means of importing the standardized information organization templates of distant engineers.

Concerns abound over the governance of social media platforms. Conservatives fear that platform moderators are biased against them. Other users worry that moderation is taking humans out of the loop entirely as it is increasingly outsourced to pattern-recognizing algorithms.

Yet even if moderators don’t govern with animus toward conservatives, tech companies are subject to the same cultural forces as other firms. Progressivism holds the commanding heights of American culture and, like other businesses, platforms are responsive to public shaming campaigns instigated by the political left.

Political bias concerns aside, the sheer scale of contemporary platform moderation should give all proponents of individual dignity pause. Governing networks of billions of users, content moderators cannot pay much attention to specific cases. Instead, they rely on opaque algorithms, fine-tuning them in an endless tradeoff between false positive and false negatives. Either way, someone’s content will be mislabeled.

It’s the inevitable cost of centralized control. Even The American Mind has [run afoul](#) of these unavoidably mistuned algorithms, which categorized an article titled “[Defend America—Defeat Multiculturalism](#)” as a prohibited use of “race and ethnicity in personalized advertising.”

Clearly, a more personal, decentralized approach to social media is needed to preserve the dignity and agency of internet users.

Instead of attempting to control bots and spammers through top-down rulemaking and legions of content moderators, Urbit makes use of scarcity. There are a limited number of Urbit IDs—enough that, as the network scales, everyone can have one, but not so many that they may be spent cheaply for quick gags like Twitter accounts.

As of now, Urbit is still in development. It’s not terribly easy to install or use, especially when compared with the convenience of downloading a new platform from the app store. Initially, Urbit is unlikely to be anyone’s only, or even primary, social media platform. Thankfully, it doesn’t have to displace existing platforms to prove valuable. Early adopters don’t have to leave their old networks behind; they can run Urbit on the side. Its long-term prospects for mass adoption are boosted by the fact that Urbit is not intended merely as a platform for dissidents. By offering a novel, simple, full stack operating system, it aspires to be much more than the next Gab. This should help save it from becoming a seedy space avoided by polite society.

However, even at this early stage, Urbit, along with Bitchute and IPFS, decentralized

video hosting and file storage services, provide an insurance policy against overbroad moderation that disregards the individual. You might not need them yet, but their existence ensures that you will have somewhere to go if, or perhaps when, platform content moderation becomes too stifling.

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